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"Let me be a bridge": language brokering among emerging adult Latina professionals in the Midwest

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Abstract: In immigrant families, bilingual children and adolescents regularly act as translators and interpreters for family and community members who are not fluent in the dominant language. These childhood language brokers later shift the focus of their translation activities as they transition into adulthood and develop professional skills. This research explores narratives of language brokering trajectories of three bilingual Latinas who were emerging adult professionals in three cities in Iowa. Based on a series of interviews collected over a 15 month period, this analysis examines how participants described realigning their family language responsibilities while simultaneously transferring their language brokering skills to professional settings in their nascent careers in education and social services. Findings indicate that not only do participants continue to engage in complex family language brokering and other kinds of care work, but they also deepen their empathy for and commitment to Spanish-speakers in professional settings.

Keywords: emerging adulthood; language brokering; Latino families; Spanish in the Midwest

1 Introduction

Children growing up in immigrant families where adults speak a non-dominant language regularly contribute to their family's overall wellbeing as informal translators, interpreters, and cultural mediators (Orellana 2009). These young language brokers' responsibilities necessarily transform through adolescence and into emerging adulthood as they redefine their family roles, pursue educational and professional opportunities, and establish new relationships (García Valdivia 2022; Guan et al. 2014; Delgado 2023; Dorner et al. 2008; Kim et al. 2024; Phoenix and Orellana 2022; Shen et al. 2024). This study is centered on three young professional

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Latinas in three different cities in Iowa and the relationship between their roles as language brokers for Spanish-dominant family members and the integration of brokering skills as part of their personal and professional development. By examining narratives about their roles as language brokers over time, we see that participants' responsibilities shifted in their multiplex roles in family networks, at work, and in the community.

This analysis draws on 14 ethnographic interviews with three Latinas in their 20s, each of whom completed 4–5 interviews, conducted between October 2020 and January 2022. Grounded in critical discourse analysis (Johnstone 2018), this study examines participants' narrative accounts about their language responsibilities before and during the COVID-19 pandemic in their families and in professional settings. Narratives are a social practice through which individuals make sense of their experiences; in this way, narratives are a mode of thought (De Fina and Georgakopoulou 2012) that gives form to what is imagined (Bruner 2010), and acts as a form of critical reflection (Ochs and Capps 2001; Relaño Pastor 2014).

The three Latina participants, who were establishing careers in education and/or social service fields, regularly stepped up to support their immigrant parents and other family members in disparate ways during the pandemic and, in the case of one participant, when a parent was deported. Two moved home and all three took on additional family responsibilities (e.g. providing economic contributions, accessing public health information, and supervising younger siblings), all of which temporarily intensified their roles as family language brokers. At the same time, they were establishing their own homes, families, and careers. As language brokers, participants grappled with language as a powerful link to family (Velázquez 2018) that is imbued with responsibility, while they negotiated spaces for independence, upward mobility, and community impact. Their narratives describe taking on language brokering and other responsibilities in emerging adulthood; a desire to guide, help, and protect family members by drawing on their language abilities, financial resources, educational backgrounds, and citizenship status; and how they turned these abilities outward in their communities and professional work.

Language brokers' formative experiences prime them to develop competencies that expand into adulthood in family settings, while simultaneously developing externally facing practices in the community as advocates in a broader sense. The development of a helping orientation over time expands from immediate family contributions to a sense of responsibility in community and professional settings. A disruptive event, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, may cause a realignment with familial orientation related to language brokering (and other kinds of care work), while emerging adults simultaneously integrate these capacities into their careers. In this sense, the life span development of language brokers does not happen on a

predictable trajectory, but rather in waves of connection, independence, and expansion.

2 Latinx communities in Iowa and the COVID-19 pandemic

The Latinx population in Iowa is 7.4 % (State Data Center of Iowa 2024), which is relatively small in comparison with 19.5 % Latinx population nationwide (United States Census Bureau 2024), but this population is rapidly growing in Iowa, having experienced a 57.4 % increase from 2010 to 2023. Of the 238,580 Iowans who identify as Hispanic/Latino, 32.1 % are foreign-born (State Data Center of Iowa 2024). Latinx populations are particularly salient in rural Iowa counties such as Crawford, Marshall, and Buena Vista where they make up over 25 % of the population, often as a result of employment opportunities in meatpacking plants and other agricultural work. In fact, Latinxs are often credited with saving small towns that would otherwise suffer population decline (Sacchetti 2022) and keeping statewide population growth on track (Iowa Latinx Project 2023). Despite their valuable economic contribution to the state as business owners and workers in all industries, "disparities exist in income, poverty, homeownership, education, and health" (Iowa Latinx Project 2023: 5), which made Latinx communities particularly vulnerable during the COVID-19 pandemic.

When the first wave of COVID-19 hit Iowa in April of 2020, it quickly made its mark on Latinx families, especially in relation to outbreaks at meatpacking plants and other employment sectors that depend heavily on immigrant workers (Czyzon 2021; Saitone et al. 2021). As of September 2022, the COVID-19 Latinx death rate was twice as high as that of non-Latinx Whites (Iowa Latinx Project 2023). Because Latinx workers are overrepresented in the low-wage sector in Iowa, they have historically lower rates of job security and less access to benefits that protect workers, such as medical insurance,[1] sick leave, family leave, and unemployment benefits (Iowa Latinx Project 2023; Zamarripa and Roque 2021). Moreover, Latinx immigrants, particularly the undocumented, were generally excluded from government programs (e.g. renters assistance, unemployment benefits, and stimulus payments) that acted as safety nets for other populations during the outset of pandemic.

Yet, the pandemic not only impacted "essential workers", but also their immediate and extended families; many Latinx young adults stepped in to support their

1 Only 78 % of the Latinx population in Iowa ages 19–64 has health insurance compared with 95 % of non-Latinx Whites (Iowa Latinx Project 2023).

immigrant parents and other family members. As such, Latinx families were reconfigured during the pandemic; older generations often saw their adult children return home and these bilingual professionals took on family responsibilities (e.g. providing economic contributions, accessing public health information, and supervising younger siblings), all of which intensified their roles as family language brokers.

3 Literature review

3.1 Language brokering from childhood into adulthood

Language brokering refers to the informal translation and interpretation that bilingual young people do for family members who are not fluent speakers of the dominant language (Dorner et al. 2008). While this term most often refers to parent-child interpretation and translation, it can also refer to language mediation between community members, in work settings, and with strangers (DuBord 2014, 2018). Many researchers have identified positive aspects of childhood language brokering, such as improved academic performance and linguistic competence; feeling pride in family contributions and the skills they develop; increased self-esteem; and enhanced understanding of their parents' experiences, which can improve their parent-child relationships (Angelelli 2016; Corona et al. 2012; Iqbal and Crafter 2023; Morales et al. 2012; Tse 1995). Researchers have found that when parents have positive relationships with their children and are supportive of their children's brokering, childhood language brokers (CLBs) tend to have positive experiences with brokering (Tilghman-Osborne et al. 2016; Weisskirch 2017). Conversely, brokering may have a negative impact on young people's mental health and cause annoyance or discomfort (Corona et al. 2012), especially when associated with situations of conflict (Bauer 2016; Crafter and Iqbal 2022) or when the task goes beyond the young person's linguistic ability. When parents have unrealistic expectations, language brokers feel burdened, which may result in parent-child conflict (García Valdivia 2022; Morales et al. 2012; Weisskirch 2017). In this way, childhood language brokering experiences are recursively reflective of parent-child relationships.

Despite these potential pitfalls, Corona et al. (2012) and Angelelli (2016) found that brokering was generally positive and beneficial for parents *and* children, despite occasional tensions between parents' expectations and their children's ability. Adults generally trusted their children over professional or ad hoc interpreters and felt like they could act as a team (Angelelli 2016; Eksner and Orellana 2012; Iqbal and Crafter 2023; Katz 2014). In this sense, language brokers and their parents worked collaboratively to make meaning. Parents who modeled good communicative

practices (e.g. asking follow up questions), modeled these kinds of practices among their children, which allowed them to be effective and confident when brokering, and ultimately to feel more pride when brokering in challenging situations, e.g. medical settings (Katz 2014).

In their innovative longitudinal study of 600 Mexican-American adolescent language brokers, Kim et al. (2024: 11–12) found that adolescents who engage in more frequent brokering develop more advanced linguistic competency and related positive emotions and motivation in late adolescence. In contrast, burdened brokers feel less confident and more anxious about brokering (especially related to complex tasks), despite being emotionally motivated to accompany parents. These findings confirm earlier research (López 2020) that there is a reciprocal relationship between language ability and emotional outcomes related to brokering.

Other authors have drawn attention to the tension between Western and non-Western conceptions of childhood in language brokering research, arguing that immigrant families often see children as active participants in securing the family's overall wellbeing (Cline et al. 2017; Kam 2011). From this perspective, brokering is just one of many responsibilities that immigrant children do for the good of their families, akin to minding younger siblings or doing household chores. In a similar vein, García-Sánchez (2018) resists ethnocentric notions of brokering as harmful to family structure and parental authority, instead arguing for the normalization of care work in immigrant households from a non-Western perspective. She focuses on young people's agency to not only affect change in their families and nurture relationships with family members, but also in the community where they act as language and cultural brokers. Yet, although language brokers are powerful in the ways they act with agency to negotiate complex social settings, Iqbal and Crafter (2023) stress that they are operating in a context of unequal power relationships which may put them in challenging situations.

In Latinx immigrant families, the care work that adolescents and young adults do as language brokers tends to align with collectivist notions of family responsibility. The concept of *familismo*, the devotion to family where a "great importance [is] placed on family values, reciprocity, and the strong emotional ties between family members" (Corona et al. 2012: 790), is valuable for understanding the normalization of brokering in immigrant families where this work is part of everyday participation in family life. Kam cautions (2011) that CLBs with a strong family orientation who engage in frequent brokering may experience family members' stress more acutely, which may put them at risk for engaging in risky behaviors. Yet, Padilla and colleagues (2020) found that older siblings with a strong *familismo* orientation experience more warmth and less conflict in their relationships with their parents.

In their longitudinal study, Dorner et al. (2008) found that immigrant youth's development does not map onto stereotypical Western trajectories of increased responsibility as a marker of independence. Instead, they argue that, from a collectivist perspective, interdependence and family contribution is a valued form of responsibility and a normal stage in maturation. The immigrant youth in their study operate under overlapping "scripts" of independence and interdependence whereby responsibility is a means of establishing connectivity with family *and* community. By acting as decision makers and cultural intermediaries, CLBs are agents of socialization for their families (Tse 1995). Furthermore, brokers' own acceptance or negation of Western cultural norms is an indicator if childhood language brokers will see brokering activities as a contribution from a collectivist perspective or a burden from an individualist perspective (Cline et al. 2017).

3.2 Brokering in emerging adulthood

In the present study, participants are in emerging adulthood; they are college graduates in their 20s and are establishing their own families and professional careers (see participant description in Section 4). Emerging adulthood describes a life stage between the ages of 18–29 when individuals are: (1) developing identities as they explore new paths, (2) experiencing instability related to employment, relationships, and residence, (3) focusing on themselves, (4) feeling that they are in-between adolescence and adulthood, and (5) feeling positive about future opportunities (Arnett 2015). This is inherently a time of transition when young adults are making decisions about personal priorities, social connections, and relationships with family and others.

Language brokers in emerging adulthood may experience conflict between focusing on their own personal goals as adults and supporting their family's needs (Weisskirch 2017). This may result in feeling less understanding of their parents' ongoing need for brokers and other kinds of assistance, especially if they perceive that their parents have not progressed in their own language learning. On the other hand, as emerging adults, they are in the process of solidifying their own sense of identity while establishing greater independence. They are primed to work toward establishing their careers and developing intimate adult relationships while deepening their relationships with their parents and developing greater empathy for their parents' life experiences (Weisskirch 2017: 16–18).

In their research with adolescent language brokers in England, Cline and colleagues (2017) found that young people accepted brokering as a transitory family responsibility and wanted their parents to have agency in their own social and linguistic integration over time in the receiving culture. In other words, despite

expressing pride in their family contributions, CLBs felt that brokering duties should lessen as they got older and that parents should take action to make sure they were fostering their own adaptation. Angelelli (2016) also found that CLBs sometimes expressed frustration when they perceived that a parent was not learning English quickly enough and continued to rely on them over time.

Although emerging adults may do less brokering when they are in college and/or move away from home, they may also perform more complex brokering as they get older and expand the network of people for whom they broker (Guan et al. 2014). In addition to increased complexity of language brokering with age, Guan and colleagues found that extensive language brokering for parents correlated with the development of transcultural perspective-taking in emerging adulthood. Accordingly, brokering allowed them to assess social situations by taking more than one cultural perspective into account (e.g. interdependent vs independent cultural values). This builds on skills that language brokers develop at a young age when they explain cultural practices that require them to understand and articulate "underlying beliefs and values systems and the respective expected behaviours" (Antonini and Suprani 2022: 151).

As language brokers move into adulthood, they draw on the cultural and linguistic skills they developed at a young age, taking on increasingly sophisticated tasks while simultaneously balancing the complexities of eking out independence and maintaining family loyalty. The following analysis will explore this process and how participants transitioned in their roles as language brokers into adulthood – with attention to how they stepped up to help family with issues related to immigrant status and the COVID-19 pandemic – and how they began to pivot outward to integrate their brokering abilities in professional and community contexts.

4 Research methodology

The current analysis focuses on a subset of a larger research project that included interviews with 41 Latinx adults[2] (32 female and 9 male) about living in Iowa, their language background, educational experiences, and the impact of the pandemic in their lives. The snowball method was used to initially recruit participants via email and they received a $35 gift card for participating in each interview. All participants lived in Iowa (or had recently moved away from Iowa), and were located across the state. After an initial round of interviews in late 2020, six participants (3 female and 3

2 While the overwhelming majority of participants were between the ages of 18–28, 4 female participants were over 40.

male)[3] were invited to complete a series of followup interviews, which lasted from December 2020 to January 2022. The current analysis focuses on 14 interviews (22 h) with the three women in this followup group, drawing on similarities in their language brokering trajectories with family, at work, and in the community.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted and recorded via Zoom in English, Spanish, or both, depending on each interviewee's preference, lasting 1–2 h. The author conducted all interviews; some participants were known to the author previously through university and community connections, and others were referred through mutual acquaintances. The larger data set resulted in approximately 100 h of recordings and 58,000 words of fieldnotes.

As all interviews occurred during the first two years of the pandemic, topics related to health care access, illness, and the panademic's impacts on work, family dynamics, and overall well-being were prominent topics. In addition, participants were asked about issues related to bilingualism, language maintenance and loss, education, employment and professional goals, family relationships and generational shifts, religion, and community.

Machine-generated subtitles[4] provided initial transcriptions which were then manually corrected by research assistants and the author. Although language brokering was not initially the primary focus of interviews, it was a salient theme for these three participants when discussing language, family, and work. The author used the Dedoose data-coding software program to code themes related to language and language brokering that emerged in interview transcriptions. This allowed the author to create an initial coding set based on research questions about the shifting role of language brokers in childhood and emerging adulthood based on the existing literature. Using Dedoose allowed the author to readily revise and reorganize codes, and revisit transcription coding throughout analysis.

The current analysis focuses on the experiences of Jessica (23), Delia (25), and Clara (28),[5] who each participated in 4–5 individual interviews[6] over 15 months. The three women had spent most or all of their childhoods in Iowa; their parents were

3 One male participant completed 5 interviews, a second completed 4, and the third completed 2. Although there were some overlaps with female and male participants' brokering, this data set was less robust and two male participants had limited brokering experiences; they are therefore not considered in the present analysis.

4 Via a private password-protected account in YouTube Studio. Videos were deleted after transcription was complete.

5 All names are pseudonyms and ages are listed at the time of the first interviews in 2020. Other identifying information has been withheld.

6 Jessica and Clara each completed a total of 5 interviews and Delia completed 4.

Latin American immigrants, and they had been language brokers in varying capacities during childhood, adolescence, and into adulthood. All were English dominant, having received their education in the Midwest, but they were also fluent Spanish speakers who spoke Spanish extensively in familial settings and increasingly in professional settings. All three moved away from home for college and in their 20s were working in professional jobs in education and/or social services. All three were able to work from home at the outset of the pandemic and Delia and Jessica moved back home with their families temporarily. All had Latino partners: Clara was married before interviews began and she and her husband bought a house during the pandemic; Delia got engaged and then married over the course of interviews; and Jessica was in a serious relationship with her high school sweetheart.

The author is a middle-aged White woman, native English speaker, and fluent L2 Spanish speaker who grew up in the Midwest. As a Spanish professor who works extensively with heritage learners, I am keenly motivated to understand how young adult professionals integrate their rich language resources into their personal and professional lives after graduation, in part to understand how to best support students at different stages in their academic development. Some participants in this study were former students, including Delia and Clara, who each took one class with me four years previous to participating in this project (although neither course was a Spanish class). I had no previous relationship with Jessica.

5 Analysis

5.1 Language brokering in childhood

Jessica, Delia, and Clara developed skills as CLBs from a young age, recounting experiences such as helping parents and other family members make purchases and financial transactions, translating and deciphering written correspondence, and interpreting at medical visits and at school. They all shared these brokering responsibilities with siblings, which is often central to their narratives. Although Jessica was the youngest of three siblings, as the only daughter, she helped her parents with a variety of brokering tasks:

> I remember going to, like, doctor's appointments, or checkup- checkups for myself and, like, you know, you're a little kid trying to know what's happening, but then you also have to, like, translate for your mom. […] You can be an interpreter or a translator but you also need to be aware of, like, specific language. So, like, if it's a, like, medical terms you also need to know both of those in both English and Spanish. […] I do remember, like, trying to translate, or, like,

> they'll- they would get mail, like uh, like mail whether it's, like, a bill, or from, like, the doctor, or just, like, any sort of bill or just random. […] So if I had, like, conferences, or if my teacher sent, like, a letter home, or called or something for whatever reason.[7] (Jessica I[8])

Jessica recognizes the challenges that CLBs face related to specialized terminology and complex ideas in medical and other contexts. She identified this as a family responsibility that she shared with her brothers saying, "I definitely did have to, like, translate and just kind of support them [parents], but we also did have my two older brothers, also would help out here and there, but if it was just, like, a me situation, I would just step in too" (Jessica I). Jessica's description of shared language brokering aligns with collectivist notions of *familismo*, whereby children in immigrant families contribute to overall family wellbeing, despite feeling the weight of these responsibilities (Corona et al. 2012).

Likewise, Clara's childhood language brokering was a task she shared with similarly-aged siblings in banking, medical, and retail settings.

> They were like new immigrants so, like, my parents relied on us to translate a lot for them. *Nosotros íbamos-* [We used to go-] like, we would miss school to go translate for my mom at an appointment, like, you know and we didn't- I remember I was in second grade, *yo no sabía cómo decir, "tengo hemorragias"* [I didn't know how to say, "I have hemorrhages"]. And my mom would be like, "*Bájate del carro y ve pide un* money order. *Un mani orden."* ["Get out of the car and go ask for a money order. A money order"] She'd say, "*mani orden*" and I'm like, what the fuck is a *mani orden*? And she's like, "go ask them" and she would yell at me because I didn't- I didn't know. She's like, "*¿Entonces pa'qué hablas inglés y no sabes?"* ["Then what do you speak English for if you don't know?"] And my sister *se bajó del carro* [got out of the car] to go to Autozone and she had to ask for *aceite para el carro* [oil for the car] and apparently she didn't ask for the right one or she didn't know how to ask. And my- my dad was so mad at her. And- and that's what I had to grow up with. (Clara V)

Clara describes her parents' frustration when their children were unable to complete a brokering task due to the complexity of the task or not understanding their parents' needs, which resulted in stressful parent-child conflict that other researchers have described (Corona et al. 2012; Morales et al. 2012; Weisskirch 2017). In this way, Clara (and her sister) sometimes felt burdened by the brokering tasks their parents asked them to complete. Rodriguez (2019) cautions that not all language brokering tasks are burdensome or traumatic, but brokers' narratives often focus on vivid memories, or "magnified moments", of very challenging or revelatory experiences that may overshadow the mundane nature of most brokering work.

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7 Segments from interview transcripts are in the original language(s). Translations from Spanish to English are provided in brackets for the reader.

8 Roman numerals indicate the order of interviews conducted between 2020 and 2022.

Although Clara had developed strong brokering skills over time, she continued to see it as an onerous task. As a CLB, Clara learned to help her parents access and process information, explaining that she continued to use these skills as an adult, "I have to, like, break it down for them and I have to repeat it multiple times and I ask them to repeat it to me so I know that they understood it. […] it's a chore, it's, like, there's a lot of steps to it [laughs]" (Clara IV). The breadth of brokers' responsibilities not only includes providing direct translation, but actively engaging in her parents' comprehension of what was interpreted through repetition, follow-up questions, and asking them to repeat the message to verify that they understood. In this way, Clara identified language brokers as more than translators; they are active communication facilitators who help decode meaning (Eksner and Orellana 2012).

Delia and the other participants saw their brokering tasks shift as they got older. Although their mother was a relatively proficient English speaker, Delia and her similarly-aged sister took on more brokering responsibilities over time, especially when translating complicated written documents.

> I think when we got to a certain age, maybe like junior high or like early high school, they started asking us more questions about, like, letters and the mail, like yeah, "What does this mean?" like- like, "Is this what this means?" and I'd be like, "No, I think they mean this" or, you know, okay, but then when we were little, no, um my mom did all that. (Delia IV)

Here Delia's description indicates that her and her sister's language brokering tasks increased in tandem with their own maturation and the complexity of the task at hand (Guan et al. 2014), a process that would continue to build in the years to come.

5.2 Language brokers transitioning into adulthood

Jessica, Delia, and Clara's roles as family language brokers evolved as they moved into adulthood. They continued to take on tasks of increasing sophistication; supported their families through hurdles related to family separation, legalization, and the pandemic; and found spaces for personal and professional development. Some of the annoyances of childhood language brokering continued into adulthood, but the satisfaction of helping family also persisted.

Clara's frustration with her parent's critical evaluation of her own and her siblings' abilities as language brokers extended into adulthood as these language practices evolved over time. Yet, Clara explained that as she got older, her parents depended on her and her siblings less as language brokers, in part because more services were available in Spanish, but also because her father had learned more English over time. She explains:

> And now you see a lot- a lot of, like, Latinos that work in *estas tiendas* [those stores] so my mom, she- she'll find someone that speaks Spanish at the bank. At Autozone they have a Spanish speaker now. Um, even McDonald's, you know. So my mom doesn't need my little sister to translate for her, um, *siempre* [always]. Like, now there's more people that speak Spanish in Iowa, even in rural- rural Iowa, […]. My dad, he speaks English now or, like, I know he understands it very well um so he- *él ya no pide que le traduzcamos* [he doesn't ask us to translate for him anymore], you know? *A menos de que llegan cartas al correo* [Unless letters come in the mail]. They'll wait until I go home and then he'll have me do it because I'm the *'estudiada'* ['educated one']. [makes air quotes] (Clara IV)

Clara acknowledged that her parents now depended on their children less for language brokering, and as adults, her older sister was the primary family broker. But, as the sibling with the highest level of education, Clara was called on to decipher written documents in adulthood, similar to the increase in brokering complexity that Delia described, a pattern that Guan et al. (2014) also identified.

Although there was a lessening of family brokering responsibilities over time despite increases in task complexity, Clara and her older sister had a *familismo* orientation in their relationships with their parents; Jaramillo and Felix (2023: 2) explain that Latinx families often have this kind of "relational orientation" where there are expectations for caring for family members, providing emotional and economic support, and taking one's family into consideration when making decision. Language brokering continues to be a marker of *familismo* in Latinx families, despite transformations happening in emerging adulthood.

When describing interpersonal family relationships, Clara explained the centrality of family and expectations for maintaining regular contact and a close family bond with parents, which echoes Corona et al.'s (2012) findings on brokering as a familial responsibility. Yet, Clara was critical of the burden placed on her older sister (and herself) that combined family support with language brokering:

> My older sister, like, we're expected to, like, so this whole concept of *familismo*, like, you have to go visit your parents every weekend, you have to call them, you have to spend time with them. Um like, so my sister- she goes more of- she's the oldest […]. And then my parents, like, you know, they've been in this country for, like, almost 30 years and, like, they- they say they 'don't speak English' [makes air quotes]. I don't know. And like, my sister has missed work […], she's missed school to go translate for my parents. You know? So that's the kind of stuff we're- we're still expected to translate, to drop everything we're doing to go help our parents out. (Clara II)

Clara was dubious of her parents' claim that they needed a language broker after decades in the U.S. and she had anticipated that their dependency on their children would decrease to a greater extent over time. Her frustration relates to a common perception that parents have a responsibility to take agency in fostering their own independence (Cline et al. 2017) and part of that process is learning English (Angelilli 2016).

Clara's narrative also described the unique responsibilities that daughters – and in particular, oldest daughters – have to broker for their parents and other family members, a sentiment echoed in research on sibling responsibility and family structure (Gershyuny and Sullivan 2014; Tse 1995; Valenzuela 1999). Clara resented the expectation for herself and on her sister's behalf that their parents' needs should come before their own. The shared nature of this task between siblings mirrors Jessica's and Delia's framing of brokering responsibility, both of whom were oldest daughters.

Like Clara, Jessica continued to act as her parents' language broker into adulthood when she helped them navigate the process of securing permanent residency, planned family trips to their country of origin, and helped her parents access public health information throughout the pandemic. When I asked if her older brothers helped out in this way, Jessica explained, "I think it's like a big cultural thing too that usually – it's the women that are kind of responsible over the mom or the parents when they need help. […] Maybe it's just my mom's comfortable- comfortability. I guess, like, she's more comfortable with me" (Jessica V). Tilghman-Osborne and collaborators (2016) found that Latina youth experienced greater expectations for family brokering in comparison with their brothers, but had more consistently positive relationships with their parents.[9] Both Jessica and Clara felt somewhat anxious with the burden of brokering tasks (Kim et al. 2024), despite their dedication to their parents' overall wellbeing that is tied to a sense of *familismo* and responsibility (Corona et al. 2012). Although Jessica generally had more positive emotions connected to brokering, she continued to wrestle with family responsibilities (see Section 5.3).

As the only family member born in the U.S., Jessica's status as a citizen put her in a position to help her parents in a way that her older brothers could not. Not only was she a language broker for her parents in English-speaking spaces, she also guided each of them through securing residency as their sponsor after turning 21. Adult children of undocumented immigrant parents regularly build on their roles as cultural and linguistic brokers into early adulthood when they draw on their "legal power" (García Valdivia 2022) as citizens to expand the ways that they act with agency to support their parents' legalization process (Delgado 2022). Rodriguez (2019) has described this process of adult children sponsoring legalization as an extension of the 'immigrant bargain' whereby parents expect their children to succeed academically, professionally, and financially to make good on their sacrifices as immigrants.

9 Tilghman-Osborne et al. (2016) also note that sons who had good relationships with their parents were more likely to broker and feel less burdened by gendered stereotypes about brokering.

When her mother received her green card, Jessica said, "She was just looking at me differently in a good sense, you know. Yeah, definitely looking at me like I did something phenomenal for her" (Jessica II). As the only daughter and U.S.-born sibling, Jessica took on many heavy responsibilities, but she also took pride in what she was able to help her parents accomplish because of her brokering skills. This reverse order of sibling responsibility (i.e. Jessica was the youngest but had the most responsibility for her parents), is consistent with García Valdivia's (2022) findings with mixed-status siblings. Jessica's status as the primary family broker is thus compounded by her citizenship status *and* gendered expectations for brokering (Valenzuela 1999; Tilghman-Osborne et al. 2016).

5.3 Language brokering and the COVID-19 pandemic

Both Delia and Jessica temporarily moved home in the early stages of the pandemic and their language brokering duties shifted as they helped family members access public health information, acting as filters and facilitators of critical information. Similarly, Jaramillo and Felix (2023) found that Latinx young adults felt pressure to help family members access accurate public health information and help them make decisions about safety protocols. When I asked Delia about attitudes among people she knew about getting the COVID-19 vaccine when they first became available, she recounted talking to her sister and other relatives about getting vaccinated and reassuring them that the vaccines were safe. In this way, Delia was a public health information broker.

Soto-Vázquez and collaborators (2021) found that Latinx university students served as health information and cultural brokers during the pandemic, both facilitating the flow of information and attempting to shore up misinformation that proliferated on social media. Their young adult participants reported that the sharing of accurate and reliable sources often happened in person with family members during initial lockdowns through conversations and consumption of media together (e.g. watching TV news), which prompted discussion. Private group messaging tools (e.g. WhatsApp) were used to share trusted media sources and dispel misinformation to family and friends at home and elsewhere. Jessica, Delia, and Clara (and numerous other participants in the broader study) described how their parents accessed public health information via Facebook or YouTube; they were compelled to dispel inaccurate information, seek out reliable sources, and share this information with their families. In this way, young people leveraged their adept abilities at media access to provide pertinent health information (Katz 2014).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, language barriers were a primary obstacle for non-English speaking immigrants and refugees to access the vaccine, coupled with

the difficulty of online registration procedures (Salib et al. 2022). Participants in Salib et al.'s (2022) research reported relying on family language brokers to access the vaccine and related public health information as Jessica, Delia, and Clara did for their families and other members of their social networks. Although Clara did not live at home, she actively facilitated her parents' access to public health resources, recognizing that they did not have access to information about signing up for the vaccine nor the technology skills or time to schedule an appointment online (Clara III). While Clara was less involved in day-to-day language brokering for her parents in comparison with her older sister, she took the lead in mediating public health information and access. In a later interview, Clara recounted helping friends secure vaccine appointments online, and then accompanying them to get their vaccine if they did not have insurance or were undocumented (Clara IV). Immigrant communities were often fearful of accessing vaccination clinics because of the documentation required, even for free vaccines (Salib et al. 2022). Taking on this role as a language broker to facilitate vaccination in her local community was an extension of the brokering work that Clara had done with her family and demonstrated her understanding of public health barriers related to language, ability to take off work, technology, and documentation.

Delia took on a significant family support role when her father was deported, which was compounded by the onset of the pandemic. She and her adult sister moved home to help their mother, shouldering greater financial responsibilities, and caring for their younger siblings, including supervising virtual school early in the pandemic. Latinx families employed collective approaches to supporting younger students' virtual learning at the onset of pandemic through collaborative practices with extended family members (Robillard et al. 2023). Delia and her adult sister were particularly engaged in their younger sister's schooling; they helped access online materials and provided structured spaces and supervision of her second grade work. This echoes Antonini and Suprani's (2022) findings that older siblings regularly stepped into the role of language and literacy brokers to support online learning and facilitate communication with teachers during the pandemic.

Despite these additional responsibilities, Delia recounted that she and her fiancé enjoyed many board game nights and hanging out in the backyard with her family; family time was a high priority. She also traveled with her younger siblings to visit their father in their country of origin because her mother could not travel; Delia, her adult sister, and her mother supported each other during her father's extended absence. Latinx young adults had increased family responsibilities at the outset of the pandemic but, by living at home with extended family, they enjoyed emotional support and avoided extreme isolation (Jaramillo and Felix 2023). The pandemic allowed older adolescents (i.e. on the cusp of emerging adulthood) to refocus on family when they were at a life stage that is a point of major transition (e.g. high

school graduation) (Shen et al. 2024). Shen et al. (2024: 6) argue that as they reoriented themselves to family, older adolescents were primed to assume extensive "family assistance", including language brokering responsibilities, through which they "derivided more positive emotional meaning from everyday experience than had been ordinary and normative to them before the pandemic".

In the early stages of the pandemic, we see that Latinx emerging adults refocused on family, at a time when they might have otherwise been looking toward their own personal and professional development. Delia succinctly explained, "We're- we're [Delia and her adult sister] working on, like, helping my mom and the kids, and then my dad, like, has a hard time making ends meet in [country of origin] too. It's- so all that, we're just like- all while my sister and I are trying to get our- our little future going too, you know? [laughs]" (Delia II). There is a notable tension between family responsibilities to parents and younger siblings and Delia and her sister wanting to launch independent adult lives. Their brokering responsibilities, which intertwined with other kinds of care work, kept them tethered to family.

Like Clara, Jessisca contributed to her family's well-being during the pandemic, noting that some of these responsibilities were self-imposed:

> That's something that, like, I put on myself normally. Either way, like, if I'm in a household that other people are living in, like, I'm gonna put- do my part, you know, like, clean around the house or try to help out with, um, you know paying a bill or two or paying rent and stuff like that. […] Essentially when I moved back, it was really just accompanying my mom to wherever she needed to go, um, because she still goes places by herself, um, like, when I'm not there but she'll avoid it at all costs. […] When I was around, we just kind of get- she gets things done right away or she feels comfortable like stepping out and stuff like that. (Jessica IV)

Jessica identifies household chores, financial contributions, and language brokering as similar kinds of tasks, signaling that brokering was just one kind of family responsibility, echoing Dorner et al.'s (2008) findings that children of immigrants, particularly those who have been CLBs, continue to take on family responsibility; in effect, balancing family interdependence with nascent independence.

At the time of her last interview, Jessica had again moved back to the city where her parents lived as she was starting a graduate program and beginning a new social service job. Jessica's mother was delighted to have her close by, and Jessica described feeling surprised at her mother's strong emotions, realizing how much her mother still depended on her for daily tasks.

> I asked her, like, "Is this different for you because, like, I'm in the same city or something?" She's like, "Yeah," like, and she was crying. She's like, "It's because you're, like, in the same city and you're with your partner now and, like, I feel like I can't really, like, call you anymore and, like, bother you," and I'm like, "That's sweet," like, I thought it was sweet but I told her, "I'm, like, you can always call me if you need something, like, that's okay." Like, obviously, I'm not gonna lie; it

> was- it was hard always having to be the one to help them out because my brothers weren't really the ones they would go towards, but I'm like, "I can still help out, like, I'm still here, like, even better, like, I'm nearby," but there was a big shift right there. (Jessica V)

Jessica's mother was ecstatic to have Jessica closeby, but was hesitant to overstep any boundaries that had been established when Jessica had lived further away. As part of this realignment of their relationship, Jessica reasserted that she was willing to continue to be her mother's language broker, despite persistent resentment that her older brothers had not taken on that role.

Jessica, Delia, and Clara continued to act as language brokers as an integral part of the care work they did for their families into adulthood. Through these narratives, we can see how language brokering is intimately related to other kinds of care work – financial, bureaucratic, emotional, legal, and technology/media (Delgado 2023) – that Jessica, Delia, and Clara enacted in emerging adulthood.

5.4 Language brokering in professional spheres

As young professionals, Jessica, Delia, and Clara integrated language brokering skills they developed with their families into their professional work. All three chose career paths in social services and/or education that allowed them to integrate their language and cross-cultural acumen to be more effective and advance their careers while meeting the needs of the communities where they lived and worked. In these female-dominated career paths, participants expanded on the gendered care work they did at home in professional settings. As Jessica was transitioning from a job in higher education to social services, I asked about the role of speaking Spanish at this stage in her life as a young professional; she linked her abilities as a language broker with a helping orientation related to her work:

> I don't want to say Spanish has made me more Latina […] No. Um, but I do think, like, it's [Spanish's] influence, like, who I am and like what I want to do and, like, how I want to help people too in a sense because I always look out for individuals like, "Oh, you don't understand Spanish, let me translate" or "Oh, you don't understand English, let me translate," um, and just kind of wanting to help everyone kind of mesh together in a sense. (Jessica IV)

Jessica's career in a "helping profession" allowed her to capitalize not only her bilingualism, but also her experience as a language broker, to bring people together and facilitate communication. For Jessica, being bilingual was not something she "is", but rather something that she can "do". Phoenix and Orellana's (2022) ongoing research on language brokering provides a useful framework for analyzing how children's brokering experiences shape the arc of their understanding of bilingualism over time; the translanguaging activities that occur in language brokering

seep into the porous spaces where perceived "public" and "private" languages merge. They found that CLBs' formative experiences are integral to psychosocial development and identity formation resulting from their own positionality and understanding of hierarchies of power.

Jessica's brokering abilities and bilingualism were intimately connected to her decision to pursue a graduate degree in a "helping profession". She saw herself using Spanish professionally in her career, and although she was confident in her speaking abilities, she was nervous because, "I'm, like, not the best at writing and I think that's probably really important if I want to offer, you know, services and, like, Spanish services" (Jessica IV). Despite being apprehensive about her writing skills in Spanish, Jessica readily identified tangible benefits she herself had previously experienced when receiving support from a Latinx service provider:

> Even though I don't really speak Spanish during my, like, their- my sessions or anything like that. Um, I still wanted [a Latinx provider] so they could kind of- I wouldn't have to, like, explain myself on certain situations or they kind of understood where I was coming from because I feel like, even then, if I didn't do that, I would have to re-explain myself, right, or kind of teach them, like, this is what I was going through, type stuff. But, them just having that background, I think was helpful for me, um, and I kind of want to do that in return, if that makes sense, so, [I'm] hoping to be a resource for the community. (Jessica IV)

Jessica articulated the value of having a co-ethnic connection in the helping professions and wanted to do the same through her own work with future Latinx/Spanish-speaking clients.

At the time of her fifth interview, Jessica had recently begun working with children and their parents in high risk situations, and was speaking Spanish extensively for the first time in a professional setting. When I asked her how she compared speaking Spanish at work with the kinds of translation she had done for her mother when she was younger, she explained:

> Yeah, uh, definitely brings back a lot of memories. […] I have to really check my self-awareness of- in regards to not getting frustrated with parents [of clients] because in my head I'm, like, telling them in Spanish and they're like, "I don't get it" and I'm like, and that- it reminds me, like, my parents, like, when my mom, I'd be like […] "What don't you get? Like, I already told you, like, what it is." But obviously I don't respond like that to clients. I'm just like, okay, […] let me try a different way to say it or explain it […] So I'll do it again, um, and obviously that's what I'm there for, but it does bring back a lot of, like, that frustration that I used to have when I was younger where, like, I would show my mom, like, how to do something online like once or twice and for me it would be easy, right? Like, I just pick it up, but I know that for adults, or it could be different […] So yeah, it brings back a little bit of memories but I feel like I have a lot, obviously, a lot more patience just because it is different. (Jessica V)

In this excerpt, Jessica linked the frustration she felt as a CLB with the brokering she was doing with Spanish-speaking adults at work. When making a comparison between these two kinds of brokering, Jessica noted that her childhood experiences made her aware of needing to explain things in multiple ways and she was cognizant that she had developed empathy and patience with her adult clients that she perhaps did not have for her own parents when she was younger.

Guan et al. (2014: 349) similarly found that brokering for parents was linked to brokering for individuals outside of the family which results in a "two-way relationship with empathic concern, the sympathy and compassion that is felt for others"; meaning that those who broker for non-family members develop empathy *and* those who exhibit empathy tend to broker more for non-family members. Jessica recognizes that when she was younger, she was often impatient when brokering for her mother, but had since developed greater empathy for her Spanish-speaking clients. In this way, the continued development of empathic concern and language brokering skills continued to form a symbiotic relationship as part of her professional growth.

Although Jessica's new employer did not pay her a higher salary[10] because she spoke Spanish, she quickly learned that they depended on her language skills in ways that sometimes pushed her beyond what she was comfortable doing (Jessica V). While Jessica was glad to put her language brokering skills to use in the service of receptive clients[11] and felt satisfaction from helping them feel more comfortable, she resented her agency's overreliance on her and the precarious position it could put her in if she were unable to interpret/translate accurately (e.g. legal cases). This echoes her experiences as a CLB where she was glad to help her parents, yet felt apprehensive about the limits of her language skills.[12] On the other hand, Jessica enjoyed working with Spanish-speaking clients and helping them feel at ease in situations that were inherently challenging.

Delia, like Jessica, saw brokering as central to being a Spanish speaker. When asked if she was comfortable speaking Spanish in public, Delia described being confident and readily speaking Spanish to help others, "Yeah, oh definitely, yeah. Yup. I always, like, any chance that I do get that- where the Spanish is needed […] I don't hesitate" (Delia I). As an adult, Delia felt comfortable in her role as a language broker for family members and in her social service work with adolescents and their

10 Lynch (2023) notes that bilinguals are seldom paid more because of their language skills, but they may leverage their bilingualism for career advancement.

11 Jessica recounted that some Spanish-speaking clients preferred to work with caseworkers who did not speak Spanish because they worried about keeping their personal lives private in their communities.

12 Although Jessica had studied Spanish in high school, she only took one class in college, which curtailed the development of her writing and professional skills in Spanish.

families. In fact, her employer was rewriting her job description so that she could work specifically with Spanish-speaking and Latinx families, thereby capitalizing on Delia's brokering skills.

Delia was pleased she would be able to make more services available to Spanish-speaking clients. Like Jessica, she described using Spanish extensively in professional settings, but initially felt unprepared to write in Spanish.

> I actually do quite a bit of writing […] I remember, like, the first two weeks I spent a lot of time, um, writing words that I wanted to know and, like, to just make part of my vocabulary and I wrote them all down on a sheet of paper and I- I remember- taped it on the wall and I started incorporating them into my sentences. […] I even had to, like, study the, like, accent marks for a while there because that's not anything I was ever taught, you know, ever. […] I don't actually translate things that fast. I- I just- I take my time, but if it's interpreting, like, speaking, I can do it. (Delia IV)

Delia began her transition into the professional world as someone who was comfortable with oral communication in Spanish in informal settings, but pushed herself to expand her professional vocabulary and orthography in her written tasks on the job. In the same interview, I asked Delia if she had imagined that she would speak Spanish professionally in her future career when she was in college. She explained:

> It was part of my hopes and dreams, but I actually didn't think I would use it as much. I thought it would be, like, it would come up once in a while and I hadn't really understood the concept of, like, word-of- mouth, how fast that runs and […] so I didn't think it would be as much. I thought it'd be, like, a treat once in a while. [laughs] (Delia IV)

Delia's surprise at being able to leverage and cultivate her language skills in a professional setting is perhaps indicative of how little she had observed Spanish being spoken in public settings growing up in Iowa, combined with the lack of connection between Spanish and her academic program in college.[13] As a young professional, she was not only honing her professional language skills in Spanish, but also delighted in speaking Spanish at work and learning new words from speakers of other Spanish dialects. This echoes Lynch's (2023) research on adult heritage speakers' use of Spanish at work in Miami, finding that they acted with agency to strengthen and expand their general Spanish language skills and specialized professional and/or knowledge of dialectal variation through a process of language socialization (Schieffelin and Ochs 1986). Lynch makes the important point that not all heritage speakers integrate Spanish into their professional personas, but rather

13 Delia did not study Spanish in college.

some make this choice in ways that allow them to enhance their careers, despite having a general preference for speaking English in other contexts.

Delia approached the development of her professional Spanish with a positive attitude as she deepened her language skills in multiple ways, and took pride in serving Spanish-speaking clients and in her own personal language growth. She described her professional experiences with language brokering with intergenerational bilingual families as follows:

> When there's, like, a disconnect between a parent and a young person. Um, just, like, sometimes the parents, you know, their expectations are different than what, like, other parents are going to be. […] So, just having those conversations, like- like helping them understand each other. […] I feel like I'm helping, like, a family unit, you know, just like building, like, the connections and also like bridging the gaps. Like, that is- I love that, because I can definitely relate at the same time. (Delia I)

Speaking Spanish allowed Delia to connect more directly with bilingual families, and more specifically with Latinx youth who were struggling with mental health issues. Delia built on her experience as a CLB and expanded that role in her professional life as a culture and language intermediary. In their research with bilingual mental health counselors who also act as language brokers, Delgado-Romero and collaborators (2018) note that although counselors often felt burdened with extra duties at work (e.g. translating materials for clients or helping complete intake forms), bilingual clinicians had greater levels of personal satisfaction and lower levels of burnout as compared to their White monolingual peers. Both Jessica and Delia actively integrated their bilingualism and experience as language brokers in their work as social service professionals, which resulted in personal satisfaction and sustained commitment to working in Latinx communities.

In the school district where Clara worked there was a high concentration of Spanish speakers and she used her Spanish confidently in this setting. Clara had studied Spanish extensively in college and drew on her language brokering skills as an educator, particularly early in the pandemic when communication with parents (and students) was an everyday challenge. She was sometimes the first person from her school to reach out to Spanish-speaking families whose children were struggling academically in virtual and hybrid schooling. Clara explained:

> Some parents literally *no saben usar el teléfono* [don't know how to use the phone]. Like, they don't know […] especially with, like, working class or like immigrant communities the- the immigrant community *como que se quebró esa relación con los maestros* [it's like that relationship with the teachers was broken]. (Clara IV)

She faulted the school for not doing a better job communicating with and accommodating Spanish-speaking families who had difficulty accessing school software

and online resources; she tried to fill that gap herself by making direct connections with parents. In this sense, Clara's dual role as an educator/language broker mirrored the educational support that Delia provided for her younger siblings at home during the pandemic (Antonini and Suprani 2022; Robillard et al. 2023). This is a clear indication of the importance of having bilingual staff, especially those with brokering experience, in school settings.

Clara's focus on parent-teacher relationships continued to evolve over the course of our interviews; in her fifth interview, she described being more direct with parents and students about their academic status. Yet, she balanced her desire for open communication with empathy for parents and not wanting to cause them additional stress:

> Some of the parents, like, they work at these meatpacking plants. They don't even know how to use [school software] and then they're like, *les echan todo en el plato* [they throw everything on their plate] and, like- like, as a teacher, I'm just sitting there, like, dude, we look bad [laughs sarcastically] like- like, we look terrible. […]. But it helps that I speak Spanish because I talk to the parents in Spanish and sometimes, like, with the [school-provided] translation, they sugarcoat things and I don't. I say how it is and I show the parents and I explain like, 'this- this is what's going on.' Um, but I don't- I don't try to contact parents because they're tired. Like, if I know that the parents work at that meatpacking plant, that they've been working seven days a week, I- *trato de no- de no hablarles y darles más problemas* [I try to not- to not talk to them and give them more problems]. Um, I also, like, started getting involved a little more in church this year, um, because of *las posada*s [Christmas celebration]. I've seen some of my students' parents there or, like, I've seen my students. I'm like, okay, that's your family member and then I talk to the parents there, so basically in the community instead of at school because then- then they're not so scared of you. (Clara V)

Clara's ability to talk with her students' parents in Spanish allowed her to communicate more directly. She recognized that her school district was often unable to meet parents where they were at in terms of both language and technology access, yet Clara was unable fix these problems alone. Her insider knowledge of meatpacking work led her to develop empathy for her students' parents and understand the limits of what they could do with the resources at hand. Clara's description of integrating herself into a local church community is indicative of her understanding of the importance of building trust with parents and students outside of school in more informal settings.

Clara's narrative harkens back to Jessica's description of becoming more patient in her work with Spanish-speaking clients and the development of empathy in emerging adulthood (Guan et al. 2014). Clara demonstrated compassion for her students' immigrant parents by engaging in transcultural perspective-taking as she balanced wanting to cultivate communication with parents and secure their support

for students' success while simultaneously recognizing the heavy burden of parents' work at meatpacking plants.

Jessica, Delia, and Clara were all the first people in their families to get a college degree[14] and were forging their own paths as they gained professional experiences. In her first interview, Clara described feeling guilty about her privileged status as a professional during the pandemic because she was able to more closely follow public health protocols in comparison with people in her life who were "essential workers". In a later interview, Clara was coming to peace with her status as a professional and how she could use her positionality to have a positive impact in the Latino community:

> In our culture- like in our values, our cultural values, you know we are not- we're collectivistic. We're not individualistic. And when you are climbing up the ladder, but you become individualistic *¡porque estás solo!* [because you are alone!] You know. *Pero- pero* [But- but] I've come to understand, okay, *estoy acá arriba pero* [I am up above here but] um, you know, *yo tengo una escalera* [I have a ladder], and I need to lower that *escalera* [ladder] and literally lift up my *gente* [people] and like, pass down, like, the resources and the knowledge, and- and that's how I don't feel so selfish anymore. […] I didn't go to get a master's degree so- *para pisotear a mi gente* [to trample my people]. I went and I got it, sorry I'm getting emotional, but like, [fighting back tears] I went and I got it to give back to my people. You know, and- and I'm like, it's not, and it's not coming from, like, a savior complex of, like, […] 'Oh, let me help you.' No, it's, like, just passing down the microphone to you, or, like, okay, you need the resources, let me connect you to people, let me be a bridge. That- that's what- I- I went and I got my degrees, so I could be a bridge and I- and I've come to accept that. [wipes away tears] (Clara II)

Clara felt a responsibility to lift up others who may not have access to the same resources that she had. As a self-identified member of a collectivist culture, she wanted to draw on her role as a language broker to amplify other voices and serve as a bridge for others. Echoing Clara, Jessica wanted to be a 'resource for the community'; and by acting as language brokers, participants integrated their language skills in the ways they cultivated community connections and maintained cultural ties, in essence, expanding a sense of *familismo*.

6 Discussion and conclusions

Across their interviews, Jessica, Delia, and Clara respectively described their professional work as helping "everyone mesh together", "bridging a gap", or "being a bridge" between different communities and speakers of different languages. They

14 Clara also already had a graduate degree at the time of interviews and Jessica was beginning graduate school at the time of the last interview.

also articulated a clear sense of empathy for Spanish speakers they encountered in professional settings, augmenting the empathy and understanding they had for their parents' experiences as Spanish-speaking immigrants (Phoenix and Orellana 2022; Weisskirch 2017). As emerging adults who had integrated language brokering skills into their personal and professional lives, they saw their own potential for acting as a nexus for community and interpersonal connections.

The pandemic intensified parent-child interdependence that resulted in new brokering activities as participants moved home, helped out financially, cared for younger siblings, interpreted public health information, and facilitated access to public health services. Despite this interconnection, the present research reveals shifts in parent-child relationships as CLBs moved into adulthood and their parents called on them to help with more complex responsibilities, yet needed them less in their day-to-day lives. Orellana and Phoenix (2017) note that families make adjustments to the responsibilities of language brokers in dynamic ways as family roles change. In this way, the integration of family responsibility and independence informs CLBs' relationship with their immigrant parents over time, not following a linear path but rather in waves that ebb and flow.

Jessica, Delia, and Clara were in the process of reformulating childhood roles as language brokers as they developed adult relationships with partners, dedicated energy to emerging careers, and settled into new communities as adults. The helping orientation (Dorner et al. 2008) that they initially developed in familial settings shifted outward to their work, despite having mixed feelings about being prepared to use Spanish professionally, particularly with Jessica and Delia who had had limited formal education in Spanish. In contrast, Clara studied Spanish extensively as an undergraduate and was confident blending her brokering abilities and bilingualism in professional settings.

An important implication is that language brokers need institutional support in connecting their language skills and brokering expertise with their professional development at the collegiate level. This includes offering robust heritage learner programs with links to professional fields, coursework focused on working with Latinx populations, both in professional disciplines and Spanish for the professions (e.g. Delgado-Romero et al. 2018; Showstack et al. 2021); service learning projects (DuBord and Kimball 2016; Lowther Pereira 2018); and internships that allow for the integration of professional skills and language skills. Delgado (2023) has mentioned the importance of place in understanding the experiences of CLBs, and in the case of Iowa, emerging adult brokers are less likely to have had models of bilingual professionals as part of their personal, academic, or professional development, in contrast with areas with more densely populated and established Spanish-speaking populations (Lynch 2023). Institutions of higher education must do more to strategically support the professional and linguistic development of bilingual students. On

the flip side, employers need to support the language work that bilinguals do on the job, ranging from opportunities for professional development of necessary language skills (e.g. specialized training), protecting bilinguals from language responsibilities outside of their purview (e.g. unpaid translation tasks), and increased pay grades for bilinguals who use their language skills on the job.

Researchers should continue to examine the life span development of language brokers to ascertain their dynamic roles in different life stages (e.g. Orellana and Phoenix 2017; Phoenix and Orellana 2022). The current study would benefit from additional interviews over time with Jessica, Delia, and Clara (each of whom will receive a copy of this article), which would allow them to reflect on continued language use and brokering experiences in family, community, and professional settings as it relates to how they forge connections, seek independence, and expand language skills.

In sum, this series of narrative accounts from adult language brokers reveals nuances in brokering trajectories. Major life events (e.g. the pandemic, deportation of a family member, employment, education) may disrupt brokering duties and family responsibilities; consequently, the experiences of language brokers are not linear. As these young professionals moved into adulthood, they maintained their familial roles as language brokers while also turning their brokering activities outward. In their professional roles, they continued to expand their language skills and use their brokerings and cultural knowledge to forge meaningful connections with the communities they served.

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